

**Amendments to the Specification:**

Please substitute the following paragraphs on pages 2 and 6 as indicated.

Replace the paragraph on page 2, lines 4-9 with the following:

Although the V3 loop is hypervariable, a Gly-Pro-Gly-Arg (GPGR) (amino acid residues 1-4 of SEQ ID NO: 1) tetrapeptide which is located at the top of the loop, as well as two cysteines at its base, are present in almost all known isolates of HIV-1, which indicates that this sequence is essential to a vital cycle step of the virus (6).

Replace the paragraph on page 2, lines 14-24 with the following:

The inventors have modified the *env* gene of HIV-1 by carrying out deletions which eliminate or decrease the hypervariable epitopes of the V3 loop. The results, obtained with a partial deletion in the V3 loop of gp160 while keeping the tip of the V3 loop, i.e. the GPGRA (SEQ ID NO: 1) sequence and the two cysteines at its base, show that the modified protein  $\Delta$ V3-GPGRA is expressed in the same way as the unmodified protein, and that it reacts with an anti-HIV human reference serum to a degree which is similar to unmodified recombinant gp160 (7).

Replace the paragraph on page 6, lines 28-33 with the following:

The *env* gene of HIV-1<sub>LA1</sub> is cloned into a baculoviral system; the variable sequences of the V3 loop were eliminated by introducing a modification into the *env* gene of pNL4-3, conserving only the nucleotides encoding the GPGRA (SEQ ID NO: 1) hexapeptide and the two cysteines at the base of the loop.